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Book review

The juvenile skeleton in forensic abuse investigations, Ann H. Ross, Suzanne M. Abel (Eds.). Humana Press (2011). 197 pp., hardback, ISBN 978-1-61779-254-0

Cases of child abuse and neglect are always emotive and attract considerable media and public attention. They are also often complex cases to work involving multiple investigative agencies and personnel. It is the multidisciplinary nature of such work that this book hopes to reflect in its holistic approach to the topic. With this in mind, Ann Ross and Suzanne Abel have brought together a number of forensic workers to create a book completely focussed on the forensic investigation of these types of cases. The twelve chapters provide a useful and interesting platform for discussion of the key issues that surround this problematical subject.

Following the Introduction, the first few chapters help set the scene with regard to the nature of the child's skeleton. These chapters serve largely to help the worker to gain an appreciation of the normal juvenile skeleton and its physical properties. So we have a chapter on basic juvenile skeletal anatomy and development, one on the biomechanics associated with fractures in children, and a chapter on the trauma associated with birth. Then we move into the forensic context proper, with chapters on non-accidental skeletal trauma, scene investigation following the death of children, the issues associated with battered baby syndrome, the detection of neglect from the skeleton and then likewise starvation and malnutrition, the use of stature calculations in investigations of abuse, and the problems associated with taphonomy and decomposition of the juvenile body.

Throughout the book, the tables and figures are clear and useful and the reference lists helpful. The editors' aim of creating a book which adopts a holistic approach is largely successful, and although there is an abundance of anthropologists present (not surprising given the focus on the skeleton) the addition of contributors from other parts of the medico-legal community enhances the discussions presented. But for me, the chapters which were of greatest

interest were those on birth trauma by Cynthia Heldrich, and Hugo Cardoso and Teresa Magalhães' on detecting the evidence of neglect from immature skeletal remains. The former because this is a topic which is rarely directly addressed in the forensic and biological anthropology literature, and yet would be of daily concern around the world. The latter similarly because of its potential prevalence ("Child neglect is the most common form of child maltreatment and failure to thrive is one of its most common manifestations" Cardoso and Magalhães, 2011; p. 125) and the complexity of diagnosing it, but also because of the thoroughness of the chapter.

I only really have two slight criticisms of this volume. The first is that, although the book has contributors from the US and Europe, there is a strong bias towards the editors' own States of North and South Carolina. This is probably to be expected, and no doubt reflects the individuals that they have worked with in such forensic investigations. But a more global perspective would have been interesting (there is a chapter which focusses on Chile, but although this is interesting seems a little incongruous when viewed alongside the other US-centric chapters). Second, that the broad scope of the book and the necessity for contextualisation (both in terms of the juvenile skeleton and the forensic work) means that some of the chapters are a little general. Nevertheless, as an introduction to this important area of forensic work, this book is a timely and welcome addition to the bookshelf.

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